

## **Warden Message – U.S. Embassy, Quito, Ecuador**

### **Reminder of the Importance of Preparing for Natural Disasters**

August 12, 2010

In light of the powerful earthquake in Ecuador earlier today, the U.S. Embassy in Quito wishes to remind American citizens of the importance of being prepared if a natural disaster strikes Ecuador.

Earthquakes occur frequently, sometimes with little warning. Additionally, Ecuador has 19 potentially active volcanoes, including nine that have shown recent activity. Tsunamis have occurred as well. If a volcano or earthquake occurs, your life could be in danger due to falling debris or lava, mud or gas flows. You could also be affected by failures of transportation, water, communications, and power systems due to damage to infrastructure or heavy ash fall. In the case of a volcanic eruption, your flight in or out of an Ecuadorian airport might be cancelled due to a temporary airport closure due to ash fall.

The destruction and disruption of services caused by a major natural disaster makes it important to plan ahead. The following information will help you plan for a major disaster. Remember it is important to involve your entire family in the planning. Because an earthquake or volcanic eruption can occur without warning, it is important to take steps now to minimize their effect on your family.

Suggestions of things to do to prepare for a natural disaster:

1. Develop a family emergency plan;
2. Identify potentially dangerous items (such as tall and heavy furniture that can topple, learn how to shut off utilities, decide how to contact family members if they are away from home remembering that phone service may be unavailable, etc );
3. Have on hand emergency supplies (plan now to be self sufficient for at least 72 hours);
4. Keep a residential hazards reduction check list;
5. Discuss with your family what to do during an earthquake, what actions to take after the initial shock.

Please note that during a major earthquake, you may experience shaking that starts out gently and within a second or two grows violent and knocks you off your feet; or, you may be jarred first by a violent jolt, as though your house was hit by a truck. A second or two later you'll feel the shaking, and, as in the first example, you'll find it very difficult (if not impossible) to move from one room to another. While there is shaking, remember to remain calm. Do not do things that will upset or panic others such as shouting or screaming. Also:

- If you are indoors, stay there.
- If you are in a high-rise apartment building, stay in the building on the same floor. Do not use the elevator.
- If you are using a gas stove, turn off the stove at the first sign of shaking and quickly move to a safe place under a door frame, archway, or corner.
- If you are in your car, pull to the side of the road and stop.
- If you are inside a car and power lines have fallen on the vehicle, do not attempt to exit the vehicle.
- If the earthquake has been severe, do not attempt to cross bridges or overpasses that may have been damaged.
- Do not be surprised if the electricity goes out, and car and building alarms or sprinkler systems activate.

Note on action to be taken after the initial shock: Remember that aftershocks are common. Move into a safe area of your home, if necessary remove all potentially dangerous items that may fall. Gather and keep all your emergency supplies and your handheld radio next to you.

If exposed when an aftershock hits, take steps to avoid falling debris by getting to as open a space as possible, away from walls, windows, buildings and other structures. If indoors, take shelter under a heavy table or desk, or in a doorway. Avoid damaged buildings, and obey all instructions from local authorities. Do not use matches, lighters, candles or other flame in case of disrupted gas lines. Avoid downed power lines.

Note on volcanic ash: Volcanic ash is not "ash" at all. It is pulverized rock. A one-inch layer of dry ash weighs ten pounds per square foot as it lands. It often contains small pieces of light, expanded lava called pumice or cinders. Fresh volcanic ash may be harsh, acid, gritty, glassy and harmful. Although gases are usually too diluted to constitute danger to a normal person, the combination of acidic gas and ash which may be present within a few miles of the eruption could cause lung damage to small infants, the very old, the sick, or those already suffering from severe respiratory illnesses.

The National Risk Management Secretariat, the Geophysical Institute and the Quito City Government monitor Ecuadorian volcanoes, issuing regular reports on their activity, as well as on earthquakes and tsunamis in Ecuador. In the event of eruptions, pay close attention to the news media for updates on the situation. Further information is available via the Internet from the Ecuadorian Geophysical Institute <<http://www.igepn.edu.ec/>> and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration <<http://www.ssd.noaa.gov/VAAC/guag.html>> . More information is also available through the Country Specific Information <[http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis\\_pa\\_tw/cis/cis\\_1106.html](http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1106.html)> on Ecuador through the State Department.

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Americans living or traveling in Ecuador are encouraged to register with the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate through the State Department's travel registration website <https://travelregistration.state.gov>, and to obtain updated information on travel and security within Ecuador.

U.S. citizens should consult the [Country Specific Information](#) for Ecuador and the latest Travel Alerts and Warnings and Worldwide Caution at the Department's web site at <http://travel.state.gov>. Updated information on travel and security in Ecuador may also be obtained from the Department of State by calling 1-888-407-4747 within the United States or by calling 1-202-501-4444 outside the United States.

The U.S. Embassy in Quito is located at Avigiras E12-170 y Eloy Alfaro. The hours and telephone number for American Citizen Service enquiries is (011) 593-2-398-5000. Within the same city use the last seven digits. Add the city code for intercity telephone calls. Public call-in hours are Monday through Thursday 8:00 to 10:00 a.m. and Friday 10:00 to 11:00 a.m.

The U.S. Consulate General in Guayaquil is located at the corner of Avenida 9 de Octubre and Garcia Moreno (near the Hotel Oro Verde); telephone (011-593-4) 232-3570 during business hours (8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.) or 232-1152 for after-hours emergencies; fax (011-593-4) 232-0904. See the Consulate General web site at <http://guayaquil.usconsulate.gov/>.